HPV Vaccine

This sheet talks about exposure to the HPV vaccine in a pregnancy and while breastfeeding. This information should not take the place of medical care and advice from your healthcare provider.

What is HPV?

Human papillomavirus (HPV) is the most common infection that is transmitted by skin-to-skin sexual contact. HPV is not just one virus. There are over 200 different kinds of HPV.

It is thought that at least half of all people who are sexually active have been exposed to at least one type of HPV. Most people will have no symptoms of HPV infection and no related health problems.

However, some types of HPV do cause health problems. Some types of HPV can cause genital warts in men and women. Others can cause cancer of the cervix and vagina in women, cancer of the penis in men, and in both men and women, cancer of the mouth/throat and anus.

If I have HPV, will that cause pregnancy problems?

It is unclear. Even though HPV is common, it is not well-studied during pregnancy. More research is needed to know if having HPV increases the risks of pregnancy problems. Having HPV is not considered a medical reason to avoid pregnancy.

It is known that HPV can be passed to a newborn during pregnancy or through the birth canal. Usually this causes no problems for the newborn. In rare cases, a baby can develop warts in his throat that can cause breathing problems.

What is the HPV vaccine?

The HPV vaccine provides protection against some types of HPV. There were several different vaccines available (Cervarix®, Gardasil®, Gardasil®9, Silgard®). Currently only Gardasil®9 (approved for use in 2014) which protects against 9 of the HPV virus types is available in the United States. These vaccines do not contain a live virus. This means they are noninfectious and cannot give a person HPV.

The HPV vaccine is approved for males and females between the ages of 9 and 26 years of age. The vaccine provides the most protection when given before becoming sexually active.

I just got the HPV vaccine, how long should I wait until I get pregnant?

Since the HPV vaccine is noninfectious, there is no specific recommended waiting period before trying to get pregnant.

I am pregnant. Should I get the HPV vaccine?

The HPV vaccine is not recommended for pregnant women because it is most effective prior to sexual contact.

Does getting the HPV vaccine increase the chance for miscarriage?

Miscarriage can occur in any pregnancy. One report suggested a slight increase in miscarriage with the newest vaccine form, while several other studies have not shown any increase in the chance for miscarriage following exposure to this vaccine in the older vaccine formulation and the current Gardasil®9 version.
Does getting the HPV vaccine in the first trimester increase the chance of birth defects?

In every pregnancy, a woman starts out with a 3-5% chance of having a baby with a birth defect. This is called her background risk. Noninfectious vaccines are considered to be a low risk during pregnancy. In over 4000 pregnancies in which the vaccine was given shortly before or during pregnancy, no increase chance of birth defects was found.

The current recommendation is to wait until after pregnancy to complete any remaining HPV doses needed.

Would getting the HPV vaccine in the second or third trimester cause other pregnancy complications?

In over 4000 pregnancies in which the vaccine was given shortly before or during pregnancy, no increase in other pregnancy complications was reported. These studies include both the older and newest form of the vaccine.

Does getting the HPV vaccine in pregnancy cause long-term problems for the baby?

Studies on women have not been done to see if the HPV vaccine can cause long-term problems.

Can I receive the HPV vaccine while breastfeeding?

Noninfectious vaccines like the HPV vaccine are compatible with breastfeeding. Talk to your healthcare provider about all of your breastfeeding questions.

If a man getting the HPV vaccine, could it affect her fertility (ability to get partner pregnant) or increase the chance of birth defects?

There is no evidence that vaccines given to men will affect the sperm. In general, exposures that fathers have are unlikely to increase risks to a pregnancy. For more information, please see the MotherToBaby fact sheet Paternal Exposures at https://mothertobaby.org/fact-sheets/paternal-exposures-pregnancy/pdf/.

Please click here to view references.